Mill's *Considerations*

Chapters VI and VIII

Defects of Representative Democracy

- Mill identifies **two** *major* defects of this kind of state:
  1. **"general ignorance and incapacity, or, to speak more moderately, insufficient mental qualifications, in the *controlling body"* (286-92):** if you want to bring ***talent*** into government, the only genuine choices are between *bureaucratic aristocracy* and *representative democracy;* the goal should be to ***combine the virtues of each*** (esp. 291-2; cf. 247-8).
  2. **"the danger of being under the influence of interests *not* identical with the general welfare of community" (292-301):** problem of "sinister interests," the "tyranny of the majority," and *class legislation* more broadly (esp. 299; cf. 245-7). ***Solution?*** See ensuing chapters: PR, etc.
- I'll briefly examine each of these two defects in turn.

Bringing Talent to Government

- Mill maintains that those "governments which have been remarkable in history for sustained mental ability and vigor in the conduct of affairs…have been…**aristocracies of public functionaries**" (288). What does this term mean?
- He has in mind here the ancient Roman republic as well as the more modern Venetian one (*doge*/senate/MC), where:
  1. The ruling bodies were ***small*** and ***skilled****:* they "accumulated *experience;* acquired well-tried & well-considered ***traditional maxims****;* made provision for appropriate practical *knowledge* in those who have the actual conduct of affairs."
  2. Each member made the ***public business his chief occupation***.
  3. "***Dignity and estimation***" were the rewards of service: **honor**.
  4. Its goals were ***state wealth and glory*** rather than the general happiness of the population. (288-90)

Talent to Government, cont.

- **Problem:** "a disease which afflicts bureaucratic governments, and which they usually die of, is *routine*; it requires a ***popular government*** to enable the conceptions of a ***man of original genius*** among them [e.g., Pericles, Themistocles {ancient Athens}; Madison, Jefferson, John Adams {U.S.}] to prevail over the obstructive spirit of *trained mediocrity*" (290).
- **Solution?:** Combine the virtues of *bureaucracy* and *democracy*, yielding "the great advantage of the conduct of affairs by *skilled persons, bred to it as an intellectual profession*, **along with** that of a general control vested in, and seriously exercised by, *bodies representative* of the *entire people... selecting, watching, & controlling the governors.*" (291; cf. Aristotle: **polity**)
- Mill appears to endorsing here a **three-tiered system of government**:
  1. a highly skilled **administration/bureaucracy**, selected and controlled by
  2. a supervisory **legislature**, which is selected and controlled in turn by
  3. a democratic **citizenry**, including the full adult population (ideally).
- The participants in all three tiers **develop their capacities** (mental, moral, & practical), but this development runs from ***narrow but deep at the top*** (highly educated, specialized civil servants) to ***broad but shallow at the bottom*** (citizenry *episodically* involved in politics, be it *direct* [local] or *indirect* [national: voting + reading news, debating with friends, etc.]).

Danger of “Sinister Interests”

- These are “interests conflicting more or less with ***the general good of the community***” (292; Bentham’s term originally).
- In an ***inclusive*** representative democracy, Mill thinks the most dangerous “sinister interest” is that of the “numerical majority” that may be “under the dominion of *sectional or class interests*” (293-4; e.g., race, religion, nationality, & economic status). The hazard is in their ***self-interested exercise of legislative power****:*

“One of the greatest dangers…of democracy…lies in the sinister interest of the holders of power: it is the danger of ***class legislation***; of government intended for…the immediate benefit of the ***dominant class***, to the lasting detriment of the whole. And one of the most important questions demanding consideration, in determining the best ***constitution*** of a representative government, is how to provide efficacious securities against this evil.” (299)

- Mill discusses ***balancing key factions*** here (300-1; cf. Madison, *Fed. #51*), but rest of C explores *other* “securities,” including….

Universal but Graduated Suffrage

- **Universal Suffrage** (327-30): required by ***justice*** (movingly argued for on 329-30) and for ***political education***. **Three** (temporary) exceptions:
  1. **Literacy requirement:** "Universal teaching **must** precede universal enfranchisement," but ***universal teaching is a moral necessity*** (cf. OL).
  2. **Taxpayer requirement:** "Those who pay no taxes...have every motive to be lavish...." So, all must pay a (small) ***"head tax"*** to become an elector.
  3. **Welfare disqualification:** "He who cannot by his labor suffice for his own support has no claim to the privilege of *helping himself to the money of others"* through political participation. (330-3; **broader implications?**)
- **Graduated Suffrage** (a.k.a. ***plural voting***) (333-41): "the opinion, the judgment, of the higher ***moral*** *or intellectual* being is *worth more* than that of the inferior: and if the institutions of the country virtually assert that they are of the same value, they assert a thing which is not. One of the two, as the wiser or *better* man, has a claim to **superior weight**...."
  - ❖**1st Best Version:** by *standardized national exam* of (civic) knowledge (336).
  - ❖**2nd Best Version:** by considering *occupation and educational attainment* as a ***proxy*** for intellectual capacity, but with a *voluntary exam alternative* (336-8). (N.B.: this was the way the British system worked until 1949—both business owners and university graduates had **two** votes apiece.)

Women's Suffrage

- As usual, Mill's *well* ahead of the curve, historically speaking (341-5). I'll let him explain his uncomplicated position:

"In the preceding argument for universal, but graduated suffrage, I have taken no account of difference of sex. I consider it to be as entirely irrelevant to political rights as difference in height or in the color of the ***hair***." (341; **cf. Plato 454c**)

- He notes the sheer absurdity of excluding women from the vote when the *contemporary* monarch (Victoria) and, on his estimation, the *greatest* English monarch (Elizabeth I) were both women, and hopes that "***before the lapse of another generation,*** the accident of sex, ***no more than the accident of skin****,* will be deemed a sufficient justification for depriving its possessor of the equal protection and just privileges of a citizen." (344-5)
- It needed over *two* generations from 1861: in 1918, the vote was extended in Britain to women above the age of 30…but only if their husbands met certain property qualifications.